

# THE YEAR OF PROBATION

By  
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NORA COUGHLIN and Tim Monahan led the grand march. Nora was pink and spicy as a carnation in her smart alkaline dress, which stood out in stiff ruffles above the slim ankles and feet. Her hair, topped by its aigrette of feathers, was a marvel of sunny pompa-

"Look out you don't get scratched."

Nora felt a pang as she gazed after the dejected shoulders of her retreating second-best "gentleman friend," and she planned a canny plot of sitting out dances with John if Tim stayed too often or too long with the refreshments.

In everyday life the Shamrock Pleasure Club ladies

jokes, and took their kisses through smoke rings, as in the dear old days of courtship. Presently Nora produced a great basket and unpacked stacks of little clothes, all beribboned and be-laced, sweet with perfume, and together the delighted lovers shook out little socks and jackets, shawls, blankets and hoods. Everything was pink.

"For it's to be a boy—Timothy by name," said Nora. It was then that Tim sprang up and uncorked a wine-bottle.

"Here's to little Tim Monahan!" he cried gayly. For a moment the prospective mother hesitated. Then, raising her blue eyes steadily to her husband's black ones, she took up her glass: "May he follow his father's steps and never get in a bog! Here's to big and little Tim."

Tim studied her face for a moment, then, setting down his glass, he corked the bottle and pushed it across the table.

"Keep the rest till the boy's first birthday. We don't drink again till then."

Alas, however, it was hardly more than a fortnight later that the old horror came creeping back to haunt the Monahan home. Stumbling steps, coarse laughter, maudlin tears and the disgrace, felt more keenly because sometimes it was John Mullen who brought Tim home. John assured her that Tim was sowing only a few wild oats—that every young fellow must have his fling. Nora must not take it so hard, he said.

The emerald and rhinestone breastpin, which she was only to wear when he was "straight," lay long in its box, waiting for Tim to redeem his many and ardent pledges. The crystal candelabra—wedding present from the Ladies' Shamrock Pleasure Club—and the glass-encased wax flower wreath—wedding present from Bartenders' Union, Local 97—followed the other luxuries to the pawnshop. One of the Monahan rooms was subtle, and the bed was transferred to the parlor-pantry-kitchen-dining-room-nursery. When little Tim was two months old it was evident that Nora must take up the bread-winning, if there was going to be any bread at all.

"The boy an' me are goin' to leave you to-day, Tim. I got a job at the Callahan Casino, takin' care of the lodge-rooms an' scrubbin' the halls an' ballroom. They'll let me have rooms an' board an' take the boy along—besides wages."

Tim's eyes flashed in astonishment and rage. After

bowing his head on his arms on the table in shame and despair.

"I ain't blamin' you none, Tim; you know I never did. You can't seem to help it; I see that."

"But you don't want the kid follerin' my steps—is that it?"

"There's more to it than that. I'm goin' to help you. Us leavin' you's goin' to be y'r chance—you bein' crazy about the boy, an' seein' you ain't sored on me yet. If we hung on you, you'd get to hate us. But if we go 'way—why, absence makes the heart grow fonder. You're a-goin' to brace up to make a nice place for us, and when you ain't touched a drop for a year we're comin' back."

"A year!"

"A year."

"How'll you know?"

"You're comin' to tell us, an' we'll believe you, all right."

As Tim climbed the stairs to his home that evening he hoped against hope; but the room was desolate. The table was set for his supper, which was warm on the back of the stove, and a tear-stained little scrawl, full of love and faith, was tucked into a tiny knit baby shawl laid by his plate.

The man flung himself upon his bed in an agony of self-reproach, grief and dread. What would become of him? He lived over his fierce struggles with temptation and the gradual realization that it was stronger than he.

Nora could hardly believe her eyes when, a month later, her husband took to dropping in to Callahan's Casino, ostensibly on business with the managers. He had got a job as manager of a hotel, and he looked like another man. Nora marveled at the success of her plan. It was evident that he was not drinking and that he secretly hoped his year of probation would be shortened; but he talked of anything and everything but this hope. Nora learned from him of his activity in politics, but she did not know she had a secret ally, who "called off" the boys, and led Tim into the fascinating maze of ward campaigning for diversion and stimulus.

Though her back was lame with work, though her pride was hurt by her menial position, though her heart ached with suspense and loneliness, she always turned a brave and laughing face to Tim and the world. She and the baby were popular with the Casino managers, lodge-members and entertainment-

give the wink to the bartender an' get sarsaparilla in the rum glass."

"I'll be workin' for you here. I'll pass the word in the lodges."

"Do that."

"An' I'll get up a Woman's Political League! Oh, I'm the modern woman all right."

The baby, who was creeping near the water-pail, crowded delightfully at this juncture and pulled the dirty suds over his fresh white dress. The modern woman sighed, as she tucked him under one arm with the mop under the other, and started upstairs.

"The new woman needs her old man pretty bad," she laughed. "Perhaps the alderman won't be having such as me."

"Better take no chances an' come home before the election."

He was handsome and strong as he stood looking up at her, and the tired wife was tempted to run down into his strong arms, baby, mop and all; but instead she threw him a kiss and made little Tim wave "by-bye."

On election day it was John Mullen who bounded up the stairs of Callahan Hall, two at a time, and found Nora vigorously if absent-mindedly sweeping the band-stand.

"He's sure to be elected. They can't beat him now, an' he's sober as a deacon."

As Nora looked into the radiant face before her a thought struck her like a flash.

"John, it's you that's been doin' it all!"

"Me! Why, I ain't only got one vote."

"I ain't speakin' of the election only." Nora sat down on the edge of the platform and wiped her proud and happy eyes with the corner of her apron.

"You ought to be an alderman yourself."

"I ain't so popular as Tim, you know."

"You're sure popular with me, an' you're popular with Lucy Scanlan from what I'm hearin'! John, why not make it two weeks from Wednesday, an' we can have a sort of double weddin'."

"I always wanted to be married on the same day as you, Nora."

Nora rose and threw her two arms around her second best gentleman friend's neck, and gave him a hearty kiss on each cheek. As she laughingly dodged out of his reach again, she whirled about to face her husband, standing stiff with astonishment and rage.

"Oh, Tim! Praise be to God the election is over,



"YOU'RE AWAY BEHIND THE PROCESSION WITH THE BUGGIES."

dour and marcel waves, which only another Belle of the Shamrock Pleasure Club could describe. She carried nonchalantly under her elbow-gloved arm a large variegated bouquet, with shiny embroidered-paper holder and streaming ribbons. And Tim! He was a born leader of grand marches! Loose black curls were trained in studied carelessness over his brow. The deferential pose of the sloping shoulder and cocked elbow, upon which Nora leaned, was one that no girl could resist; and the amble of his knees and hips, as he slowly led the long line of dance couples, was in latest Bowery fashion.

It was a splendid pageant that trailed down the center of Callahan's Casino Hall under the brilliant electric-light clusters. Two members of the Floor Committee distributed dance programs with irreproachable solemnity. The onlookers sat spellbound by the growing intricacy of the march as it progressed: two by two alternating, four abreast, four by four alternating and abreast, and at last, with a great blare from fourteen pieces of Milligan's Band, a solid line of the fair and the brave advanced across the hall amidst tumultuous applause and whistling from the boxes.

Even the austere reserve of Nora and Tim thawed in this moment of triumph. They smiled proudly into each other's eyes as they swung into the first waltz to the music of "My Wife Won't Let Me."

"You're all the goods, Peaches! You don't dance with any one but me this night," said Tim.

Nora handed him her dance card for answer, and he put it in his pocket, and left her declining dances in a thickening crowd of swains, while he went to get his first drink.

John Mullen, though late in arriving at the ball, was very confident as he held out his hand for Nora's program; custom justified him in expecting special favors.

Nora only tipped her chin. "Nothing left; you're away behind the procession with the buggies."

"Cut it out!"

"Ask Tim."

"I'll bet you and Tim's going to do the grand march the rest of the evening!"

"You'll be winning on that bet."

John pushed closer angrily. "Is that his pin you're wearin'?"

"It is so. No other."

were known as "plate hustlers," being waitresses by trade.

But under the spell of Milligan's Band, Nora Coughlin had left the every-day world. As she floated the waltzes or glided the two-steps she moved as in a dream. Tim swept her with him across the slippery hall when he went for refreshments, and she forgot John, though he conspicuously flaunted Lucy Scanlan in the range of her vision. Nora was easily the Belle of the Ball, but she forgot even this supreme glory when Tim led her out among the fluttering shadows of the Casino garden and whispered:

"The next ball will be a weddin'—eh?"

After the next ball, which was a wedding, Mr. and Mrs. Timothy Monahan began light housekeeping in two neat furnished rooms. Sometimes the housekeeping was very light, for bartenders' pay-days often end in festivities which make inroads into weekly incomes. While Nora could take substitute "lunch-shift jobs," the Monahans were able to "manage," but when she had to devote herself to baby clothes, it took nothing short of genius to keep the rent paid, oil in the kerosene stove, and provisions in the pantry.

The young wife would not nag. She nursed Tim's headaches and kept her heartaches to herself.

One frosty pay-day morning, as she turned up her husband's overcoat collar about his ears, she said:

"What's the matter with you coming home to-night an' us havin' a birthday reunion, you and me?"

Tim's face showed conflicting emotions.

"Is this your birthday, Peaches?"

"My first—I don't count anythin' before the weddin'."

"What'll I bring you?"

"Yourself."

He kissed the red cheeks and the eyelids which were shyly dropped, and his voice choked as he tried to speak lightly:

"That's easy."

It wasn't so easy; but Tim dodged "the boys" that night and returned to find his wife in her wedding dress, bustling over a festive table. She produced savory, steaming dishes from the kitchen and pantry corners of the parlor-dining-room; and he proudly unwrapped mysterious bundles as the feast progressed. They lived over old times, laughed at old



UNPACKED STACKS OF LITTLE CLOTHES, ALL BE-RIBBONED AND BE-LACED.

a moment he said grimly:

"You go whenever you get tired stayin'. You got tired awful quick, for all the bluff you made. You don't get the kid, I guess; I'm the father."

"You got another guess comin'. Looks like I got to be mother an' father both." Nora's voice was scornful.

Tim was all a-tremble from late dissipations. "It's easy enough for you to say give it up. Just you try it," he flung out savagely, sinking into a chair and

and-dance-committeemen who came and went, making engagements and arrangements for the rooms and halls of the great building. Tim found himself courting her all over again.

The change in Tim was so great that Nora was not greatly surprised when he told her he was "up for alderman of the Twelfth Ward."

"Now Heaven help you, Tim, in the campaign," she said, with double meaning.

"The Lord helps them that helps themselves. I

an' you've beat every way! Don't mind me kissin' John, I had to kiss somebody, an' he came first. He's engaged to Lucy Scanlan, an' we're goin' to have a sort of double weddin' dance in this here very hall, two weeks from Wednesday. It's so great I took to kissin' John by mistake!"

"I'll stay right here an' see't they ain't no more mistakes," and Tim caught his wife to his heart, while John, knowing it was time for him to go, slipped out unnoticed.

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